

WALL STREET JOURNAL
4 April 1986ARTICLE APPEARED
ON PAGE 20

Keep Ethiopia Part of the Reagan Doctrine

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Since seizing power in 1977, Ethiopian dictator Mengistu Haile Mariam has imposed a Stalinlike reign of terror on his people. His forced resettlement campaigns, collectivization of agriculture and disregard for human rights have wreaked economic and social havoc and resulted in the suffering of millions of people. Not surprisingly, Mr. Mengistu, who is closely aligned with the Soviet Union, also has meddled in the internal affairs of neighboring Somalia and the Sudan.

The challenge for U.S. foreign-policy makers is to devise a strategy to persuade Mr. Mengistu to halt external meddling and institute sweeping reforms internally. Regrettably, the Reagan administration seems to be sending mixed signals on Ethiopia. When the president articulated what has come to be known as the Reagan Doctrine in his 1985 State of the Union message, he said the U.S. should support freedom fighters in Angola, Afghanistan, Nicaragua, Cambodia and Ethiopia.

Since that time, however, Ethiopia has appeared on and then mysteriously disappeared from what might be called the administration's "freedom-fighter list." George Shultz included Ethiopia in his February 1985 freedom-fighters speech, and the president mentioned the country in his October 1985 U.N. speech in the context of regional disputes that we need to resolve with the Soviets. However, Ethiopia was not included in the State of the Union message this year, although I've heard that Mr. Reagan included it in a subsequent statement. What gives? Does the Reagan Doctrine apply to Ethiopia or not?

I believe this on-again, off-again approach reflects the influence of the defeatists at the State Department who want to see Ethiopia bumped from the freedom-fighter list. As Yonas Deressa, president of the Ethiopian Refugees Education and Relief Foundation, has noted, the department's stance with respect to Ethiopia "seems to be implementing the Brezhnev Doctrine [which proclaimed the inviolability of communist states] as opposed to the Reagan Doctrine [which seeks to aid democratic resistance groups fighting communist oppression]."

The State Department does not favor sanctions imposed by Congress as a rule, and will probably oppose legislation recently reported out by the House Subcommittee on Africa. That legislation, which contains elements of a bill proposed by Rep. Toby Roth (R., Wis.), adds Ethiopia to the State Department's list of Communist countries (making it ineligible for Ex-Im Bank loans), requires the president to report to Congress within 45 days on the status of Mr. Mengistu's forced resettlement campaign, and gives the president the option of imposing sanctions against the Ethiopian government. Two Senate resolutions, sponsored by Sens. Paul Trible Jr. (R., Va.) and Robert Kasten Jr. (R., Wis.), express U.S. opposition to the systematic oppression of the Ethiopian people. All of these are worthwhile measures.

At the same time, there is an additional, and potentially very effective way, to pressure Mr. Mengistu: The U.S. should support a little-known group of pro-democratic resistance forces known as the Ethiopian People's Democratic Alliance (EPDA). Although there are a number of Marxist-oriented resistance groups operating in Ethiopia, such as the Eritrean People's Liberation Front and the Tigre People's Liberation Front, both of which want to secede from the country, to my knowledge the EPDA is the only non-communist, non-secessionist movement.

Based in the Sudan, the EPDA aims to rid Ethiopia of Soviet imperialism. The group publicly supports democratic self-government, social justice (including equal rights for women), genuine independence, accelerated economic development, private ownership of land and a political order that ensures individual freedoms. EPDA statements advocate creation of a constitution guaranteeing freedom of speech and religion, the right of workers to strike, freedom from arbitrary arrest and seizure, and the right to due process of law. A multi-ethnic group, the EPDA accommodates the rights of all religious, cultural, ethnic and linguistic groups that respect democratic pluralism.

According to press reports, EPDA leader Dereje Deressa claims that with political and financial support, the group

could put 50,000 men in the field within months. The U.S. should back the EPDA in order to pressure Mengistu into negotiations with the EDPA. A presidential envoy and regional negotiations to this effect ought to be considered.

While Washington vacillates, the Soviets, who have had a deep interest in Ethiopia for more than 25 years, have established a firm foothold there. They have access to air bases in Ethiopian cities, have established a naval support facility on the Dahlac Archipelago, and have shipped more than \$4 billion of arms to the country since 1977. The Ethio-Soviet alliance poses a serious threat to Western security because Ethiopia is the linchpin of the strategic Horn of Africa. The country's proximity to the Persian Gulf oil fields and its location bordering the Red Sea could assist any Soviet effort to choke off Western energy supplies. (Significantly, Ethiopia and the Soviet Union recently signed an accord for bilateral cooperation in oil drilling and natural-resources exploration and exploitation.)

While we should support freedom fighters in Nicaragua, Cambodia, Afghanistan and Angola, we cannot afford to ignore the democratic resistance movement in Ethiopia—a country whose population of 42 million is greater than that of the other four countries combined. Nor can we afford to let the Soviets tighten their noose around the strategically important Horn of Africa any further.

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